

## . What it was and what has been at stake?

In October 2011 — May 2012, for the first time after perestroika (ie after 1985-91s) Russia was embraced with mass protest meetings. Having begun as civic protest, they quickly acquired a political character. A real political opposition has emerged and has got access to political arena. It has been a serious challenge to existing political regime. From the bird-view, it was a set of mass protest meetings across the country against the unfair campaign of parliamentary and presidential elections lasted almost half-a-year. But it is rather superficial and one-sided view. Actually, we were dealt with a highly transformative systemic phenomenon with changing aims and forms of collective action. It began long before the first mass protest meeting and still not ended. Initially, the mistrust to the existing electoral procedures has been at stake. This mistrust grew gradually, expressing itself in local protest actions, mobilisation of already existing social movements, first of all human rights movement. But this cycle of protest actions had not been a movement in a strict sense of the word (with clear-cut goals, written programs, etc.). Rather, it had been a *mass resistance movement* which was very diverse in ideology and action repertoire, but united by the said mistrust. This mistrust may have open (petitions, marches, rallies) or overt forms (protest voting or rejection from it at all). Nowadays, when the above electoral cycle was over, and new president and parliament (the State Duma) initiated some steps toward more democratic political system, the protest cycle seems ended as well. But the sharp feeling of injustice has remained. The Solzhenitsyn's ethical imperative 'To live without lie' come to the forefront. It means that mistrust to the basic principles of existing political system still remained and it would engender new forms of opposition's activity. Naturally, every next protest meeting generated the new form of the state response. Therefore, we were actually dealing with the developmental *process of struggle* between the state and pro-Kremlin movements, on the one hand, and their political opposition, on the other. In one way or another, a reform of Russian political system is at stake.

## 2. A 'new middle-class' as the collective actor and its constituency

The period of 2000s was the time of intensive empirical study of the processes of social stratification in Russia and in particular of the evolution

of a middle-class (Anikin, 2009; Golenkova, Igitkhanan and Orekhova, 2010; Golovlyanitsyna, 2009; Gorskov, 2011, 2012; Lapin, 2011; Tichonova, 2007; Tichonova and Mareeva, 2009; Yavlinsky and Kosmynin, 2011). Basing on these works, I define a 'new middle-class' as a part of Russian middle-class which is engaged in the sphere of informational production and, accordingly, is actively embedded in various social networks and network communities. I attribute to this class those involved in innovational practices, ie those who is capable to take decisions and to assume the responsibility for them; those who prepared to creative activity beyond the prescribed norms and procedures. The crucial point is that the expectations of this class could not be met by existing regime.

'New middle-class' is mostly represented by young people (20-35 years old), who lived in Moscow and some largest cities of Russia. As a rule, they grew in families in which both parents have a higher education. Members of this class are engaged in science, education, private business or in various NGOs, though this fact is usually missed by the majority of researches of social stratification. But this is a principled fact because in the cases of social conflicts these NGOs are often transformed into the SMOs, that is, into the nuclei of protest movements. Among the meeting attendants one could observe a lot of liberal professionals. It is indicative that nearly a half of the 'new middle-class' were jobless or were forced to became blue-color workers during the crisis of 2008-09s. These people are politically active because have a risk to repeat this sad experience of 'downshifting' in the run of forthcoming economic crisis. They are politically active for the reason that their satisfaction in their labor and quality of life are the lowest among all categories of modernizing countries in the world (Lapin, 2011).

It is necessary to distinguish this 'new middle class' from another new specific middle-class which shaped in 1990s at the expense of extra-income from the selling of natural resources. This class is a kind of service-class subjected to the ruling elite (Yavlinsky and Kosmynin, 2011).

### **3. Shifts in national and global contexts**

The said mistrust is both tightly bound with turbulent context, national and global. The looming second wave of the economic crisis; entry into the WTO, which is fraught with complete conversion of a good many branches of economy; the volatility of exchange rates and other uncertainties